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A CHINESE SEAL
and other poems
MILDRED PALMER CAIN

A CHINESE SEAL

and other poems

BY
MILDRED PALMER CAIN



Publishers

DORRANCE

Philadelphia

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PS 3505
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1923



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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NOV -5 '23

To
a Light which shone
an instant, in the mist

Acknowledgment is made to several magazines and newspapers, including:
The American Poetry Magazine, The Parish Helper, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin.

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A CHINESE SEAL
and other poems

A CHINESE SEAL

AND OTHER POEMS

A CHINESE SEAL

"A Chinese seal!" they say, and twist and turn
The slender piece of jade, to learn the carved
Inscription's secret word. "You ask its meaning?
Yes, I know what it means: 'Peace, Tenderness!'"
"How nice and quaint," they say; "thank you so
much."

I smile, half-sad with wonder that they are deaf
To the low beating of some ancient gong,
That they are blinded to the sunken pool,
Half-hidden in a Chinese garden's gloom,
She seeks to hide her tears; he wears the dress
Worn by a Chinese warrior; tense his face,
"Peace, tenderness, I leave them both with you,
Carved in this sea-green jade, O Lotus Bloom!"
Perhaps he fell in battle, and by the pool
She waited day by day, until her prayer
Was answered, and her heart found rest and peace
In death. And there beside the pool the seal
Carved by slim, boyish fingers for his love,
Lay hidden in the grass until one day
A peasant greedy for the gleam of gold
Found it and sold it to a foreigner.

"Peace, Tenderness," and hopes and prayers long
dead

Still lodge, grey, gentle ghosts, within the jade.
"It's 'quaint' indeed," I say, "I'm glad you like it."

TIME AND TIDE

I stood alone at sunset by a sea,
When all the west was fenced with shields of gold,
And watched the flame-tipped waves, which cap-
tive hold

The rocky shore and all humanity.
Though all about me was serenity,
Yet, I saw maddened waters, lashed by cold
Relentless winds, and grey waves wildly rolled
Against the shore, pounding it ceaselessly.

Time, is an ocean, beats upon our shores;
For one it murmurs softly, as the waves
Which gently lap the beach in sunset's light;
And in another's ear its fury roars
Striking down, careless, to the very staves
His dearest argosy of dreams tonight.

BLUEBELL

Oh, Flowers, have you seen her,
The lass with bluebell eyes?
Did she pass this way at daybreak
When gold dropped from the skies?

Oh, River, have you seen her,
My lass with wind-tossed hair?
Did she lie upon your banks
And weave dream-fabrics there?

Oh, Skylark, have you heard her,
My love, who sings for me?
Have you heard her song of silver
Athrob with ecstasy?

Oh, stars or moon at even
Were never half so fair
As my love, who walks at twilight,
With dew upon her hair.

MY LOVE

Are you weeping because the earth is fair,
And the moon drops low from the purple sky,
And the rose is sweet on the evening air?
Then, say, will you pass the sweetest by?

You weep for beauty and laugh at pain,
And while you are young you may smile at
death;
You may jest at my love which has prostrate lain
At the gate of your heart with fainting breath.

But you will be old and the years will flout you,
And you will grieve that you passed Love by;
Then will come folding its wings about you
My love,—which has sorrowed but could not
die. . . .

GOWNS

In my closet, hid away, behind a thick oak door,
Gowns of silk and lace are hung
And a fragrance clings among
Their folds, a rainbow throng from which there
used to soar:

Blithesome thoughts, all twinkling with jewels of
merriment,
Somber thoughts in sober grey,
Foaming thoughts from which the spray
Of ocean had not yet been brushed, a moon-white
wonderment.

Mortals wear a thousand gowns; a thought, a
mood, a look
May clothe one in a robe of rose
From crown of head to tip of toes,
Or dress one in the dullest brown, all dusty from
the nook

Of laggard brain wherein it dwelt, or one may
weave a veil
Of misty mauve, or ocean blue,
Or thought-gown spangled thick with dew,
A thousand moods, a thousand gowns, illusive
cobwebs frail.

A DESERTED GARDEN

Gaunt, broken branches against the moon,
What do you moan as the wind sweeps through?
Do you sigh for the days when the sky was blue
And the garden drowsed in the heat of noon?
Do you weep that your youth is gone from you?

Sad, purple branches alone in the dusk,
Alone in the garden so still at your feet,
The garden is dead, and yet lingering sweet
There's an odor of roses, of jasmine, of musk,
Cloying perfume of Romance, newly dead, in-
complete.

PARADE
(On Memorial Day)

There's a sound of marching feet,
Of the soldiers passing by.
All the flagged and pennoned street
Is a glory to the eye.
Bugle-call and slow drum-beat
For the soldiers passing by!

Uniforms of faded blue;
Old men with white heads held high,
These the lads whom Lincoln knew;
And there's not one wonders why
Heads are bared to pay their due
To these soldiers passing by!

Boys in olive-drab, and brown,
Swift of foot and keen of eye.
Ah, the roses raining down
On Youth, unafraid to die!
Cheer, though cheers in tears must drown,
For these Golden Lads passed by!

Slow the splendid column goes;
But before the echoes die,
Hark! a ghostly bugle blows;
Dark against a rose-gold sky,
March slim lads in silent rows,
Boyish soldiers who "passed by"!

FAILURE

"He was a failure." So the whole town said
When old man Cotton died. "He never had
A dollar saved. You know, he bought that bed
For Johnson's baby, when the little lad
Was sick with fever. Well, the old man's dead."

"He was a failure, and always sang away
And scribbled rhymes when there was work
to do;
And he'd make bundles, tie each with a spray
Of grass, and mail them as the post cart rattled
through.
He might have known that such work wouldn't
pay."

"He was a failure," and yet there's not one child
But called him friend and loved his faulty
rhymes;
And even though his eyes were dim, he smiled
At Life and want, and always said that times
"Would soon be better—wasn't April mild?"

"He was a failure," and yet when he lay
Quiet and still in death, all the town mourned;
And children stumbled blind with tears to say
"Good-bye to Uncle Joe," while those who'd
scorned
His careless, singing life were dumb that day.

ROMANCE IS DEAD

Romance is dead!
She died last night,
And I have smoothed her hair
And folded gently on her breast
Her poor, tired hands.
Her lashes rest lightly
On her pale, thin cheek,
But her lips smile softly still
Even in death.
Stately she lies,
And in her bridal dress,
Which is her shroud.
The bell tolls sadly, mournfully
For Romance
Who lived but for an hour.

THE MAGNOLIA

Swaying from head to foot, gowned as a bride,
Hearing soft throaty calls on every side,
Smiling and nodding to all who pass,
Letting a milk-white flower fall to the grass;
So stands the bride of Spring all through the day,
Waiting the Southern Wind, a bridegroom as gay
Maid never mated with. Hark! Philomel's calling.
Faint gleams her bridal gown in the dusk greenly
falling.

MY THANKS TO YOU

I have passed often through the darkening night
Over sharp rocks, which cut my weary feet,
With head that drooped, and eyes could scarcely
meet

For sting of bitter tears the fitful light.
My hair has turned from gold to frosty white,
And ghostly wings about my path have beat;
Still, I passed on toward thy mercy's seat,
Toward the comfort which dwells in thy might.

I never brought a sorrow to your door
Except your presence soothed the smarting pain,
Mistakes and sins as well I've brought you there,
"Poor child," you said, and half my sins you bore
On your own head. Dear friend, I must in vain
Seek to express the love and thanks I bear.

THE DREAMER

He sits and hammers the yellow gold
And his eyes are dim and weary above his work;
Steps come and go before his door,
But he heeds nothing.
His body is in Chinatown,
His soul in China, the Everlasting.
His dreams are made of jade, royal blues, and
 golden dragons,
They are scented with jasmine and lotus blooms,
And through his dreams floats the wailing of the
 flute
And the pattering of tiny feet.
In his dreams She is ever present,
With her lacquered hair and almond eyes,
Vermillion lips and pale, pointed chin.
"Tap, tap," beats his hammer on the gold,
But on his heart it is the beating
Of two little scarlet, painted heels.

TOUT PASSE

So many lights that flicker and die out,
So many eyes grow dimmer day by day,
So many, many years that seem to flout
Our hopes and fears, and yet not one may stay.

So many roads whose ends are never reached,
Though fair the sky that bends above our way,
We lose the blue, nor heed the sermon preached
By tree, or stone or bird on flowering spray.

So many friends lost in the drifting mist,
Like phantom ships tossed on an angry sea,
But we fare on alone, by turn and twist,
Forever onward, yet not ever free.

WRECKAGE

Down in the orchard there stands a tree,
Bent and gnarled from the lightning's whim,
There's a haunting sadness steals forth to me,
A sadness which makes my eyes grow dim
With misty tears for the tree which stands
Bare and brown, while its fellows dance
In their perfumed gowns, and I lift my hands
To hide the sight from my saddened glance.

And I think of my life as cold and dead
As this storm-struck tree in the orchard there;
My life, which once flowered madly red
In the breathless, wine-sweet, summer air
Of golden youth, has passed in storm,
And the cold winds blow through my heavy
heart,
While Youth still passes on softly warm,
But I, as the dead tree, stand apart.

OCEAN IN WINTER

Restlessly beating upon the sand,
Rushing and swirling;
Powerfully hurling
Fragments upon the land.
Fragments from sea depths, darkly green,
Tokens and treasure
Out of all measure
Still clutched by hands unseen.

Beating relentlessly all through the night,
Ebbing and moaning,
Advancing and foaming,
Shouting defiance at light.
Binding with frail, glassy ropes made of spray
The shore. With your skill,
Your imperious will,
Ruling the waters of grey.

On a bright morning almost peaceful you
seem;
Sparkling and smiling,
Falsely beguiling
As a glimmering queen
Who smiles on her lovers with death in her
heart.
Bewitching and luring
Each man from his mooring
To make him of yourself a part.

TO JOHN KEATS

Leaving your heart's gold fragments on Life's
shore,
Tired of the fight against a mocking world,
Your new, green flag of hope forever furled,
Your voice struck silent from amidst the roar
Of other voices, seeking to implore
Some mercy from the Sea of Fame which purled
Restless and grim over the rocks, and hurled
Spray on the sand, ground from Life's rocky floor.

Perchance your gentle spirit wanders still,
Sometimes, among the haunts where once you
dreamed,
And smiles to see our reverence for you now,
Remembering the cruelties which kill;
Look! high above the wastes, the star which
gleamed,
And too late shed its radiance on your brow.

SINCE YOU ARE GONE

The sunlight creeps into the room
 Where once we dwelt,
And in each corner's purple gloom
 Its rays are felt;
And yet, it's very dark, in spite
Of rainbows in the failing light.

The firelight flickers on the wall,
 As gay as when
I heard your cheery, whistled call
 And dropped my pen
To run to meet you on the stair;
Now, only silence waits me there.

The days move on with hasty tread,
 And sometimes I
Scarcely believing you are dead
 Lay memories by,
Memories of goals we hoped to gain,
Goals which forever, now, are vain.

FAIR CONQUEROR

Today there fell, in shining white,
A dazzling army through the air;
They captured every tree . . . but there!
One's held a prisoner in your hair!

Would that my bondage lay, as his,
In that rich mesh of glittering gold;
I fear I should be twice as bold,
So near your cheek, but . . . Now I've told!

WITCHES' DANCE

The night has come, and the stars are out,
And the wind has died.
The witches are dancing in merry bout
As the solemn mortals they seek to flout.
As they weirdly glide.

The witches' cats sit about in a ring,
And with yellow eyes
They watch the witches who madly sing;
And the owl is perched like an evil thing
That fears surprise.

'Round, 'round they go in the whirling maze,
Red shoon and golden hair
Glimmer and gleam in the sparkling blaze;
But a mist rolls down in a thickening haze
On the firelight's flare.

They weave enchantments and wicked spells
With their siren songs,
And ghostly laughter from hills and dells
Joins with their singing, and tinkling bells
From the unseen throngs.

So whirling on 'til the first faint light
Proclaims the dawn.
A last mad round, when they fade from sight;
Cats, witches and owls with the passing night
Once more pass on.

EPITAPH

Your task complete
Pass on with steady tread,
The Morning breaks
Anew, lift high your head.

TO ONE . . . FORGETFULNESS

“. . . And to one who hath known Life to his sorrow
shall be given the pale flower of forgetfulness.”

There is an hour before Night's veil is torn,
When phantoms creep on silver-sandaled feet,
Thronging with silent tread the empty street,
Searching the byways for souls yet unborn
To Beauty, who, to Triton's horn
Turn deafened ears, closed to the sudden sweet
Peal of the golden trumpets as they beat
Against the gates of Heaven in the morn.

Silent, these ghosts go questing for an hour
Among the ways of men, before the dawn,
Halting an instant to give one who sleeps
Their phantom gift. The little, pale-green flower,
Laid on the eyes before the night is gone,
Brings peace to one who tasted Life, and weeps.

YOUTH AND AGE

If Youth held Ages' wisdom
He would be a miser.
Guard each precious moment,
Hoard each golden hour.
But Youth is a spendthrift.
He marches gayly down the sparkling street,
His tasseled purse open
Scattering his golden coins on the way.
Age crouches in the corner,
Half jealous but wholly confident;
Youth has a long way to go
And the purse is nearly empty.
Youth laughs carelessly, blithely,
And Age smiles on to himself.

MY GRAIL

Was that the hasty footstep on the stair?

I waited in the gloaming . . . very still,
For the revealing kiss upon my hair:

Till Night crept in across the window-sill,
And found me weeping . . . for I knew with me
Such vigil ended in eternity.

Today it seemed I'd hear your voice again,
And all the world was halted . . . Though I
knew

That never in this world of toiling men

Would I, who wait so long that call from you,
Hear your gay voice a-hailing down the years.
I hurried on . . . half blinded of salt tears.

VALE

(To C. H. C.)

Here's sleep at last and rest for you,
So close your eyes and sink serene
Into the Night. Gallant and true
Your fight, but victory dearly won.
Though laurel-crowned, your head is bowed
And chained your hands. Youth's gifts thrown as
The milky pearls before the crowd
Of swine were cast; your strength you gave.
Return unto The First of Things,
Beyond the doors of mortal clay,
And Peace hold high with steady arm
Her shining lamp to light your way!

DOUBTS

Sometimes there comes a fluttering in my breast
Of ghostly wings, and whispers fill the air,
And the dry rustling of long dead leaves
Thrills . . . the while it fills me with despair.

Soulless sometimes I can well think myself,
Heartless . . . and still such bitter, blinding pain,
Could not come from dead leaves nor fluttering
wings
Beating and hovering 'round me in the rain.

WHAT CAN THEY SAY?

What can they say of you in years to come?
Will they with shining eyes speak loud your name,
Or must they turn away, because of shame
And say, "Alas, how little has he done
For good, but drifted with the tide,
Made waste his gifts, neglected God and man
Seeking delight and as a hurricane
Carelessly passed, and so unwept he died."

Or can they say, "Here was a man indeed!
Upright in spirit, strong and true of soul."
Pray God that we when Death has taken toll
May have at least sowed one immortal seed,
That men may say, "He did not live in vain."
And softly pause, ere they toil on again.

ST. VALENTINE'S

I love you, dear; frown not, my sweet,
Upon my heart, which at your feet
Lies begging for a smile from you.
Yes, I have played, alas, 'tis true,
With other maids, yet I entreat

You will with mercy my heart meet,
And spurn it not with slipper neat;
Oh, let me whisper soft your due,
I love you, dear.

You linger yet, though very fleet
Of foot, sweetheart, amongst the wheat?
Under your lash a glimpse of blue,
I press the rose-red lips of you;
What? Oh, dear one, to me repeat,
"I love you, dear!"

SPANISH NIGHT

The tinkling of mandolins
And dreamy eyes under lace mantillas.
The tapping of high-heeled slippers
Through the languorous night.
A whispered question . . . a stolen kiss,
A red rose falling from a balcony.
The curve of a white arm
And the flash of a brilliant eye.
The swish of a silken skirt,
And the sound of running through the
streets,
A soft voice speaking words of love.
This is night . . . is Spain.

SOUL'S QUEST

Last night as I lay dreaming,
My soul slipped forth and sought
A verse of lilting cadence
Crowned with immortal thought.

It sought o'er breezy hilltops,
Among the silver stars,
Within green depths of ocean,
And 'round the ship's tall spars.

Up then it flew in quest of
The new moon on her way,
My soul searched in the darkness
To find my wished-for lay.

And when at dawn I wakened,
The song was in my heart,
For the verse I had been seeking
Was of my own soul a part.

TO RUPERT BROOKE

(Died April 23, 1915. Buried on the Island of Scyros, in the
Aegean Sea)

There is a spot far off, beside a Sea,
Though lying distant from proud England's shore,
Which is in substance England, even more
Than British downs sung by her minstrelsy.
In that rich earth a richer dust than tree,
Or leaf, concealed a dust which England bore,
Gave, once, her flowers to love and all her store
Of wind, and sun, and rain, and revelry.

"Safe, though safety's lost, shall be my going,"
And bravely, gayly, all your gifts you gave,
Poured out "the red, sweet wine," and smiled to
drink
A toast with Death, so fresh the wind seemed
blowing
From hills of home, and turned with one last wave
Passing with steady tread the misty Brink.

QUEBEC

The early sun shines out above the river,
That flows before Quebec, grim sentinel,
Sending a million gold-tipped shafts to quiver
In those grey walls, by Montcalm loved so well.

KEEP THOU FOR FRIEND

Keep thou for friend the noisy, babbling brook,
Give me soft twilight and a well-loved book,
Then, when the daylight dies into the night,
Send me the warm glow of the firelight bright.

Keep thou for friend the glaring light of day,
Give me the dawn, with rosy clouds at play
Upon the strong, true bosom of the sky,
Or the late west, where fades the crimson dye.

Keep thou for friend the cruel pride of youth,
Give me warm age, wherein the warp and woof
Of pain and joy are merging into night,
These bring me peace; take thou the light.

. QUESTIONINGS

To wake again in a new world of light,
To find sweet music where all has been tears;
To see fresh forms to look on with delight
After the long, dark years.

To pray once more with an unbounded trust;
To hear again at dawn the lark's sweet call,
To know that there is more than "dust to dust"
In that Beyond for all.

After this life a going . . . and what then,
Are we absorbed into that Cosmic Soul?
Or does life come with all her tears again
Before we join the Whole?

A CHINESE SEAL

FATE

A little love I sought,
But Fate denied;
God, how I wanted it;
Then, my heart died.

A bit of fame I sought,
Fate turned away;
I shed some bitter tears,
Then, went my way.

A moment's peace I sought,
The tumult raged;
Within my heavy heart
My soul was caged.

Now only death I seek
From day to day;
Hate hides with staring eyes
My soul to slay.

"CHANSON INDOUE"

I never hear that music beating low
Whether in darkened theatre or the street,
But that I dream of some far brazier's glow
And dusky shadows' swiftly moving feet;
While the dim, ghostly, half-sad echoes flow
Now loud, now soft, now overpowering sweet.

A tragic chanting of some ancient wrong,
A wailing of the living for their dead,
A heart which tells its message in a song;
I hear them all before the sound has fled
Back to the Silent Places, and the throng
Has drawn me with it, dazed, but beauty-fed.

AFTERMATH

The tumult died . . . the countries were at peace,
God in His might from Heaven had sent release,
And mothers wept to see their sons returned,
Wearing on brow the palms which valor'd earned.
Gone was the smoke, the glare had faded too,
Out flashed the sun, at last, though pale in hue,
From weary watching o'er a weary world.
Peaceful at last, the nation's flags were furled.
Now time must heal the wounds that scorch and
burn

In women's hearts, left empty-armed to yearn
Through long and dreary years for loved ones
gone
To worlds unknown to view Eternal Dawn.

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MY GIFTS

I may not sing in the greater way,
For mine is a little gift;
 But a song at night
 By the fireside bright
May set the thoughts adrift.

Adrift on a rolling, golden sea
Of glorious happiness;
 With a dream of love,
 And the God above,
And a soft hand's warm caress.

I may not play as musicians play,
With a gift of flowing gold;
 But a tender tune
 'Neath a new spring moon
Is enough for my world to hold.

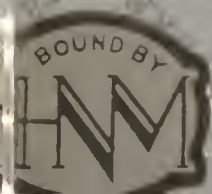
So I sing and play in my own small way
And the world goes marching by,
 With a roll of drum,
 And a busy hum,
But we care not . . . my heart and I.

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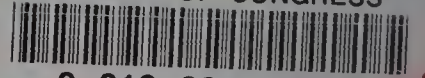
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